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Working Paper

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8 June 1976

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MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM : George Bush

SUBJECT : Modification of the Classification and  
Dissemination Controls for the Products  
of Reconnaissance Satellites

1. This memorandum recommends that you authorize the Director of Central Intelligence to declassify the fact of the existence of the US satellite reconnaissance program and to make certain modifications in the existing special security control system that restricts access to its products. Because the current classification and special security control system were established by Presidential directives, any changes in them require Presidential approval.

2. The recommended changes constitute an important first step in implementing one of the duties assigned to me by Executive Order 11905. Specifically, Section 3 (d)(1)(viii) states that the Director of Central Intelligence shall "establish a vigorous program to downgrade and declassify foreign intelligence information as appropriate and consistent with Executive Order No. 11652."

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Background

3. In August 1960 shortly before the US satellite reconnaissance program began producing useful information, President Eisenhower directed "that the products of satellite reconnaissance, and information of the fact of such reconnaissance revealed by the product, shall be given strict security handling under the provisions of a special security control system approved by me." This was at a time when very few people were aware of the program and even the feasibility of using satellites for intelligence collection was considered sensitive. As the program progressed and produced large volumes of information useful for a variety of intelligence purposes, thousands of people were given access to the intelligence within the special security control system. Concurrently, the fact of the existence of the photographic part of the program became public knowledge. It also became apparent that the special security control system was inhibiting the full use of the information derived from the program.

4. As a consequence, in 1973, President Nixon authorized the Director of Central Intelligence to make modifications in the classification and access controls regarding the photographic products of the program.

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Now, most of the photography and almost all of the information derived therefrom is available to US officials at the SECRET level outside the special security control system. This has greatly increased the use of intelligence derived from the photographic reconnaissance program. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the elimination of the special security controls on the products of the program has in any way jeopardized the ability of the program to continue to provide intelligence.

5. The Presidential decision of 1973 also required that the fact of the existence of the photographic reconnaissance program be classified at the SECRET level. The effect of this decision in turn mandates that any information derived from and attributed to satellite reconnaissance be classified SECRET or higher. Even though the 1973 decision did increase the usefulness of satellite-derived information, there is considerable pressure to again modify the classification of the product and the program itself. Our military commanders claim the SECRET classification, together with the complex procedures involved in handling the information and the photography, is unnecessarily restrictive and limits the utility of the product, especially for military planning and at lower levels of

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command in the field. Others claim that the classification of the fact alone severely limits the potential non-military uses of the products. There is also general acceptance of the judgment that much of the photography from this program is not otherwise sensitive and could be very useful for economic planning not only in the US but more particularly in the Third World.

6. Much has changed since the 1960 decision to classify all aspects of the photographic reconnaissance program at TOP SECRET and within a special security control system. Now, the existence of the program has become public knowledge both at home and abroad. In these circumstances it has become difficult to justify the continued classification of the fact of the program even at the SECRET level.

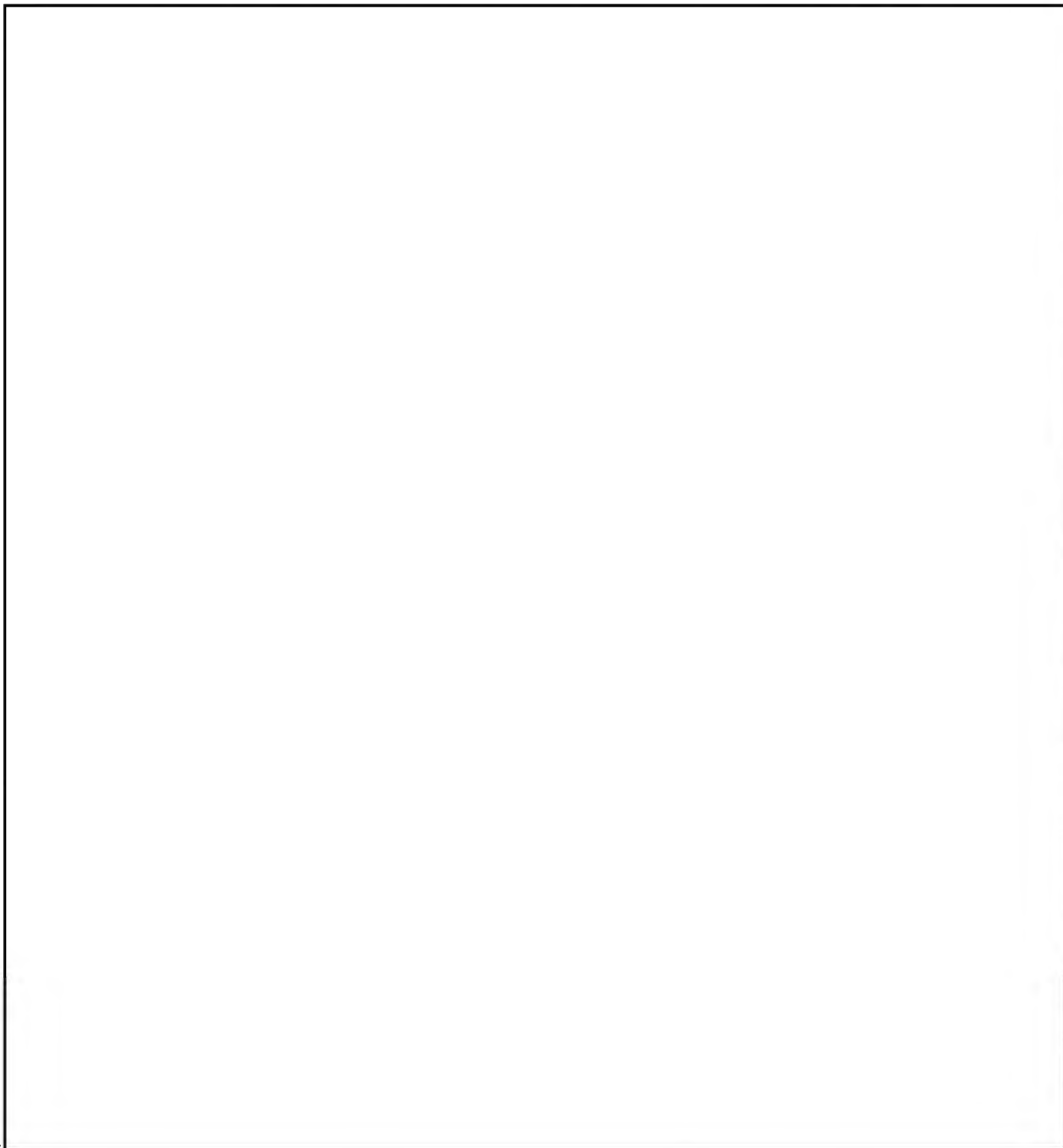
7. Continued classification has been argued on the basis of concern that official public acknowledgment would provoke diplomatic protests from some foreign governments about US violations of territorial rights. Some such protests have already been raised with regard to the NASA programs which are officially announced. Thus, it is not so much the knowledge of the existence of photographic satellite reconnaissance or even protests about satellite photography,

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but more that an official announcement of the now-classified program  
could provoke new protests or restatements of old ones.

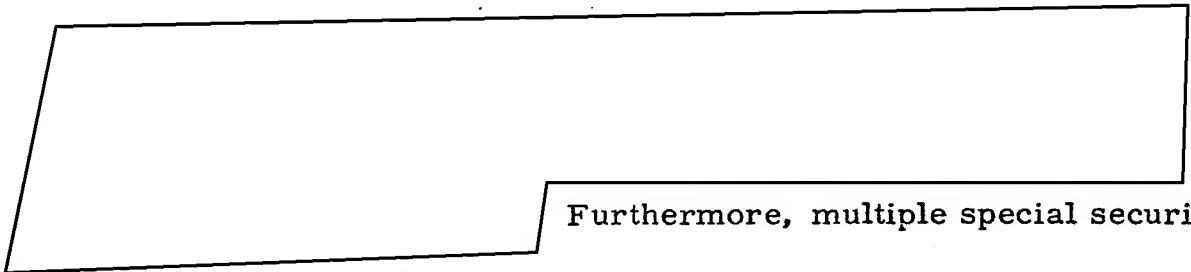
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Furthermore, multiple special security control systems tend to complicate the handling of this kind of intelligence and to limit its usefulness unduly.

10. You should be aware that there are some people in the United States Government who believe that any changes in the present system of security protection of satellite-collected intelligence would jeopardize the program. They argue that the present system can be made to work. Others, mostly users of intelligence, believe that the present system is too cumbersome and causes unnecessary delays in the availability of intelligence, especially for tactical military purposes. I believe that the changes recommended below would facilitate the increased use of the less sensitive intelligence collected by the satellite reconnaissance program. Deputy Secretary Ellsworth and the Joint Chiefs of Staff also advocate modifications along these lines.

#### Conclusions

11. I conclude that the fact, and only the fact, that the United States Government conducts satellite reconnaissance



can be declassified without

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jeopardizing the flow of intelligence from these satellites. Officials of the United States Government should be instructed not to initiate any public announcements of this fact but should be prepared to acknowledge it when necessary. All other aspects of the program and its products can be classified and protected in accordance with the criteria presented in Executive Order 11652. It should be noted specifically that no change is to be made in the classification or the system of special security controls presently applicable to the operational aspects of the satellite reconnaissance program.

12. I also conclude that procedures can be developed to reduce the use of the special security control system now required for signals intelligence collected by satellites as long as that intelligence is protected by appropriate classification or by the special security control system for other signals intelligence.

Recommendations

13. In accordance with Section 3 (d)(1)(viii) of Executive Order 11905 and the spirit of Executive Order 11652, I recommend that you authorize the Director of Central Intelligence to:

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- a. Declassify the fact that the United States Government conducts a satellite reconnaissance program, instruct officials of the United States Government to avoid any official public announcement of it, and to acknowledge, when necessary, only the fact

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- b. Classify all other aspects of the program and its product in accordance with the criteria presented in Executive Order 11652.

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14. If you approve these recommendations, I assure you that changes will be made with due regard for my responsibility--as stated in Executive Order 11905, Section 3 (d)(1)(vii)--to "ensure that appropriate programs are developed which properly protect intelligence sources, methods, and analytical procedures."

George Bush

The recommendations in Paragraph 13 are approved \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Attached is a revised draft of a memorandum from the DCI to the President regarding the classification and handling of satellite reconnaissance products. Please review the draft and provide comments to the Chairman of the Security Committee by 15 June.

You will note that the memorandum recommends declassifying the fact of the program. I am well aware that some of you are strongly opposed to this and are prepared to support reducing the classification to CONFIDENTIAL. I will discuss your comments with Mr. Bush before preparing a revised draft for circulation to the NFIB members in advance of placing this matter on the agenda for a meeting of the NFIB.

[Redacted Signature]

Edward W. Proctor

Date

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Cover Memo to FO 889323-76

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Remarks: For your information, attached is Ed Protter's latest draft on the DCI letter to the President. Copies have gone to all members of his ad hoc group for comments.					
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